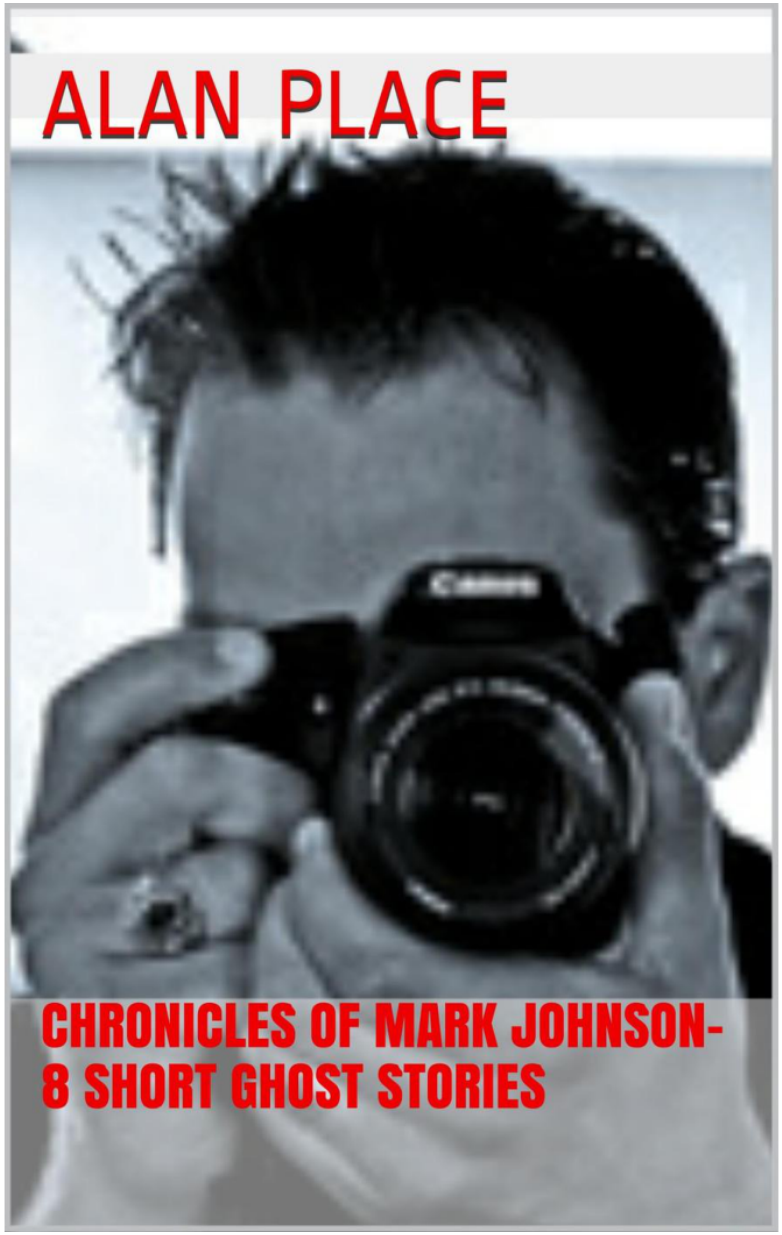
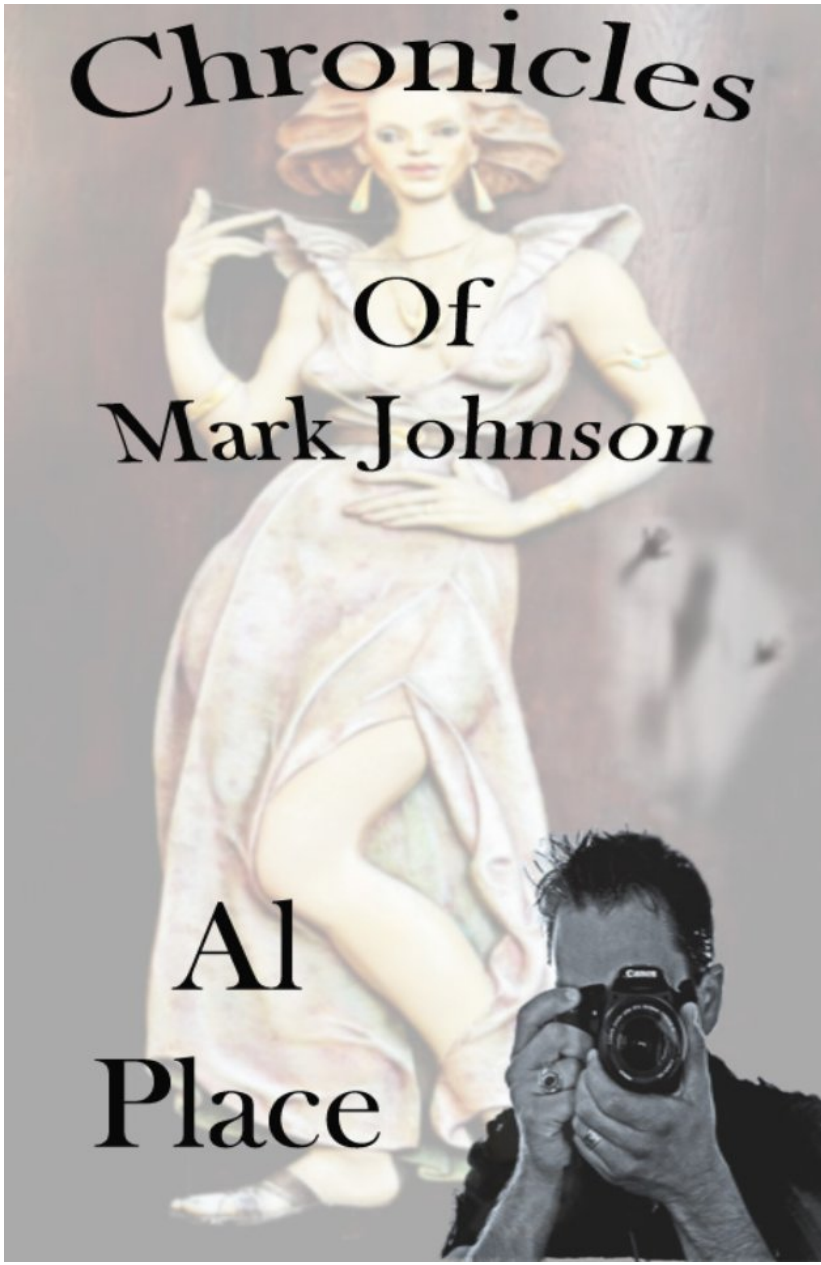

ALAN PLACE
CHRONICLES OF MARK JOHNSON-
8 SHORT GHOST STORIES

Chronicles

Of

Mark Johnson



Al Place

Chronicles of Mark Johnson
8 short ghost stories
Horror by P A Canella

Chronicles of Mark Johnson

Chronicles of Mark Johnson, Volume 1

Alan Place

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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

CHRONICLES OF MARK JOHNSON

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Written by Alan Place.

Also by Alan Place

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Avenging Angel

Chronicles of Mark Johnson
Chronicles of Mark Johnson
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Dedication

Chronicles of Mark Johnson

“Are you expecting things to go wrong?”

“We didn’t see anyone!”

“Same as ever was. Now get over with Mark, I am going to drop this down. Where you are standing is the psychic centre of the area.”

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Further Reading: Wharfemere Finale

About the Author

Dedicated to the journalists like Tim Page, Mike Herr, Sean Flynn, Marie Colvin and others too many to mention who put their lives at risk to bring us the news.

I would like to dedicate the series of Chronicles to men and women like Sean Flynn & Dana Stone (missing in Cambodia since 1970), Tim Page, Philip Caputo, Michael Herr, Kate Aide and the other brave reporters who bring us the news from the war zones.

Among the people I need to thank are my friend and cover designer Yezall Stronhheart, without whose lovely covers my work would not be ready.

Angela Priest for lovely colour inserts.

To the tireless work of my good friend and editor Carol Wills, I say I am truly thankful beyond words for your help.

And to my three great friends Ruth Slattery, Hazel Jackson & Mary Holding, thank you for your never ending support and in believing in me and the stories even when I doubted myself in October 2011.

Last but by no means least, I would like to thank the readers. Whoever & wherever you are for taking the chance on an unknown writer.

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THE WIND IN YOUR FACE

The man sitting on the clifftop at the edge of his garden, taking photographs of birds as they swooped and dived, looked calm and in his element. Until the phone rang. The phone call brought him back inside the house, which was not a good start for Mark Johnson who begrudged spending time indoors. After many years working in laboratories and studios trying to make a name for himself, he longed for the air.

“Hello, Phil.”

“Mark! When are you going to do some high-profile work again? This damn phone is ringing off the hook for you ?”

Further introduction was not needed. Phil Moore, a longtime friend, was the only person who had the reclusive Mark’s phone number.

“Well, you know my philosophy, Phil, so you can feed them whatever BS you want. I do not do celebrity shoots, models, or work for tabloids. When I do a shoot it has to be for real. Not because someone needs to be in the limelight for a while! When I get a real shoot I will come back from obscurity - then and only then, Phil!”

“I just don’t get you, man! Top of the class in photojournalism; agents calling me for you to shoot their people. You could be out there with the lights on you, making so much more of your talents than selling the odd article here and there.”

“You hit the nail on the head when you said photojournalism. I do picture stories, not pretties for the glams and tabloids. That part of my work is what drove me here if you remember. I found it soul-destroying and sickeningly shallow.”

“That is as maybe, but it's the best paid work, and you are the best. They all want you mate.”

“They can want all they like, until I get something that can arouse my spirit, I am content as I am. The stories I sell allow me what little pleasures I require- a roof over my head, food in the freezer, and the pleasure of being out here in the elements.”

“That's something else I never got about you. Mark. How, when you can make such a lot, are you happy with next to nothing?”

“I just never got into wanting all the trappings of fame. The story is what it's all about. I am a photojournalist first and foremost. If the shots don’t tell a part of the story, then I have failed. I know I can make my name, have lots of money and fame, but for me it was

never about that. For me it has always been about the shots."

"I can't tempt you, then? Not even with a trip to Italy for three weeks in the sun, with masses of pretty girls to shoot."

"No. You can treble any offer made, but I am **not** interested. Never was, never will be. Those that chose that lifestyle can keep it. I am doing what I like now. I stuck with that false crowd for four or five years when I got started. Every night I ached to take real pictures - stories that would do my art justice."

"All the years I have known you, you have never changed. Throughout college courses and afterwards, money was never your driving force was it?"

"No, you have that right. I would rather struggle selling a few stories and being true to who I am, than clicking for magazines, just to show how pretty a lady is. If she is that pretty, then let it shine through. So many of them just love themselves and I cannot abide their shallow lives. Out here in the wind and rain, watching the birds and animals, that is what I am all about, Phil. If you get an interesting story for me, please let me know. As for any offers for celebrity shoots, feed them the BS you feel is right."

"OK Mark. Got the message. Can you tell me something?"

"I will try to."

"There was a rumour about your college having a research group checking into psychic abilities. Was there any truth in it?"

"There was no secret about it, Phil. We did have a grant to do psychic research, some of us developed great powers and can see the spirit world at times. We didn't make it known for obvious reasons, we were doing serious research into psychic ability and didn't want to be classed as just a bunch of crackpot ghost chasers."

"You are kidding, **seeing ghosts!"**

"Not at all, think of us as receivers of signals, some people are more adept at receiving than others. We started out as a group of about 20, by the mid-term of the first year there were only 3 left. Me, Rachel Stockman & Pat Sammels. We call them essences rather than ghosts, they come in all forms and some not very nice."

After Mark put the phone down, he turned and walked across his ramshackle old kitchen to the stove, he lit the gas so he could make a pot of his favourite coffee. The wind was picking up and the choppy seas were making the bell in the river clang loudly.

“*Be good shooting today," Mark* thought as he looked out across the bay.

That was always something that mystified his friends. When the sun was out, Mark would rarely take a shot. Give him winds, rain and high seas, and he would be out there for hours. One friend asked him *why* and Mark replied, **“If you want great shots, you have to go chase the weather; you won't get them if you're sitting inside in on windy days!”**

The clouds rolling over the hills were low and threatening as the thunder roared and the lightning flashed. Up on the hills, Mark thought he could see a face at the old Morton Manor, but he was certain nobody lived there. It had lain derelict for the past twenty years, and no-one had been near it since the mysterious disappearance of the young girl. Over the years of his seclusion Mark had become adept at tuning into the lost and lonely souls of the dead, at first he wondered what had happened to make this occur, now he realised he was a receiver of messages from across the void and accepted it.

Some stories told of a stranger in the area, days before she vanished. Others told of a light in the old house and weird howling noises. Here on the coast, tales of strange happenings abound but this had taken place in recent times, with modern equipment, not olden days with archaic instruments that could not be trusted.

Mark felt this was an interesting story, worthy of his talents; an unsolved mystery for over twenty years, all but forgotten in the area. From those he had asked about the mystery, he had received the same answer – a wall of silence. It was as if the townsfolk were hiding something; something they did not want to admit. No police reports had been kept and no record of the events at the house was available. The whole town was cloaked in deathly silence, as if this was their curse for all time.

Since Mark was a virtual newcomer, he had not known about the history of the Morton house, as he was usually out on the cliffs. He barely paid attention to the old house on the hill until, one day, he happened to be passing on his way to photograph some strong waves crashing in the cove. It was then he thought he saw a face peering out from the house. As a journalist this piqued Mark’s curiosity. However, all avenues of research ended either in a dead-

end or a wall of silence. The greater the silences and dead-ends, the more determined he became. But how could he get to the bottom of the mystery?

As well as searching through the town records, he went to the County, but all attempts to get information proved fruitless. He had plenty of questions, but could not get answers from anyone. After months of foot slogging and stone-walling he simply gave up. But he never forgot about the face which plagued him constantly. But when all records have been cleared out, where can you go?

As much as it pained him, he was forced to come to terms with the facts: something bad had happened and they wanted to hide it. He felt beaten. The whole area seemed to be locked down. *Whatever it was, it must be really bad*, he thought.

For years, nothing more happened, but every time he saw the old house he wondered about it. One night he was sitting on the cliffs when a stranger approached along the cliff path. At first glance it appeared to be a young man in his thirties. There was something odd about him. Mark could see he was limping, as he dragged his left leg behind him.

“I see you are a photographer as well," observed the man.

“Yes I came here to escape the rat race, the glamour shoots and the celebrity. I used to be well-known years ago, but now I just sell a few stories.”

“I know. I have been watching the house for the last few months, deciding if I was doing the right thing or not.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mark.

“My name is Richard Morton. I used to own the house on the hill, I came here thirty years ago and lived happily on my own for ten years. Then a girl came from the city. She was beautiful, with long black hair and a slender figure. She worked up at the house as cook and cleaner, until she went missing that fateful day.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. I was in town for the day, and when I got back all hell had let loose. They had her wet body on the ground. When they saw I was wet as well, it became a mob mentality. I had no chance against fifteen deranged men. They beat and kicked me, then threw me over the cliffs to make it look like a suicide. I survived more through luck than judgment. The incoming tide broke my fall a little, but even so I was badly injured. I managed to crawl to the caves down there and believing I was dead, they never checked. I

survived for days on crabs and lobsters I scavenged from pools. I died from my injuries a few months ago and have come for one last look.

"That explains the lack of records of what happened. You said you were wet?"

"Yes. It was a windy day and I loved to walk on the shore. That day the waves were really running and I got soaked through."

"Did they find out what happened?"

"Oh yes, a few days later. By then the deed was done and the town had was sworn to silence to protect the guilty families."

"Since the records have been expunged, how can I find out what happened?"

"The only way is to go up there yourself. The face you see in the window is hers. She is riddled with guilt that her death led to my murder. If you can free her soul, we can be freed to love again . . . on this side."

"I will see what I can do for you."

"Thank you, kind sir."

As the day started to draw to a close, mists came in from the sea. Mark started his walk up to the old house with a feeling of trepidation. He was unsure if he was doing the right thing. The town had closed the subject and no-one had ever mentioned it.

Maybe, I should let sleeping dogs lie, he thought. *But there has been a terrible miscarriage of justice and the town needs to be cleared of this shared blame, so they can move past it.*

As he arrived at the old house, there was an overwhelming sense of gloom surrounding it. The darkened windows were filled with cobwebs and there were broken tiles on the ground. The door groaned as Mark pushed it open, camera in hand. He slowly moved across the hallway. Nothing stirred, not even a breeze. The air was so still and damp it was stifling, and Mark found it difficult to breathe. As he approached the kitchen door, he felt a sea breeze. Turning to the right, he noticed a door was ajar and slowly walked through it and down the steps to the sea below, the steps became steeper, the closer they were to the shoreline. He was just about to place his foot on another step when a voice from behind halted him. Turning around, Mark looked up and saw the girl. She did not move as he took her photograph.

“**Please be careful,**" she called. "It was there I slipped and cracked my head before I fell into the water.”

“Then the outgoing current carried you out and left you on the shore, where they found you?”

“Yes, I was semi-conscious. Not being able to swim, the tow pulled me under and I drowned. When Richard returned they all thought he had drowned me in a fit of jealousy. He would never have harmed me. We loved each other so much that summer."

“The moaning the town’s people can hear -is that you?”

“No. I don’t know where that came from. I came to look at the lovely glowing lights, slipped and fell to my death.

After thanking the girl, Mark took some photos of the caves, the steps and reflections. As he was just about to turn away, the girl motioned him down to the shore. As he looked down, the last shot he took was of the two lovers, gliding out of the caves, arm-in-arm, finally at peace.

As he was walking away from the house, Mark was met by a local fisherman. “The council have asked me to tell you that they will be in contact with you about what has gone on,” the man said as they stood in the street talking.

In his hotel room he was writing up about the mystery, when he heard a knock on the door. “*Who can that be this late?”* he thought.

Going to the door, he noticed an envelope had been slipped underneath and was lying on the mat. He opened it, and inside was a note:

Dear Mr. Johnson,

We are sorry you have met with such resistance during your investigation of the mystery of Morton House. We would like you to attend a meeting, as we understand you have more information on this subject. We cordially invite you to a meeting in the library in order that you may explain your findings and we may end this matter.